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writers. The general tone of our popular compositions has been showy and declamatory, a natural result of the influence of free and independent forms of government upon the buoyant spirits of a young, enterprising, and prosperous people. Under the continued patronage of these liberal institutions, (which must always operate powerfully on the genius of a language,) we trust that the English tongue will put forth its energies with new spirit and freedom. But as this is the natural tendency of our political system, we should early endeavour to regulate it; and it is particularly incumbent on every scholar in the present daily, we may say hourly expansion, of a more cultivated literature, to set an example of pure, perspicuous, classical composition, and not to mislead the unpractised judgment into extravagance or affectation.

It is more particularly the province of works, of the description we have been examining, to set this example. As specimens of fine writing, as works of taste, they come before the public; and it is in their power, if well conducted, to hold a salutary control over the taste of the public, especially over that of young and plastic intellects. In this way they may be eminently useful. We look upon them as the transitory beauties of cultivation, which may exercise a propitious influence on the public mind, when they themselves shall have passed away, and by the introduction of a finer taste, prepare it for the growth of a more elegant and a more enduring literature.

ART. XVIII.—*Circulars addressed to the American members and patrons of the American Academy of Language and Belles Lettres. By the Corresponding Secretary.*

THE second and third of three circulars of this kind are before us, and are more particularly within our view, in the few remarks we design to make. The newspapers of the day have informed the public of a project for an American Academy of language and belles lettres; and the circulars, which have been published, contain an account of what has been done towards its organization, but consist principally of the correspondence between the corresponding secretary and

various gentlemen of the highest respectability in our country, upon the general subject of the institution. We should fail in our duty to the public, did we omit to express our opinion of an institution coming forward with a name, and on a plan so imposing; and if our remarks should not command the approbation of the gentlemen who have been most active in the measures hitherto adopted, we hope at least we shall not be thought to exceed the limits of fair dissent.

The 'American Academy,' as appears from the second circular, was organized in June, 1821, by the choice of a President (the Secretary of State of the U. S.) three Vice Presidents, a corresponding and a recording secretary, a treasurer and eleven counsellors, one only of whom is an inhabitant of the state of New York. In addition to the names of the foregoing officers, a list of twenty eight members resident at New York is given, a second list of corresponding members from the several states of the union, and a third list of foreigners proposed as corresponding members. By whom proposed, or on what principle of selection, we have found ourselves, so far as concerns the last, much at a loss to conjecture.*

* We cannot but regard the following as an extraordinary explanation.

'The list of officers and members is furnished, as far as under present circumstances it can be made: but that of the members is to be considered only as an approximation to one strictly accurate. Our extensive territory, and the imperfect knowledge of the character of our scholars, as such, make it a work of time and much difficulty to obtain correct information, and to introduce the literary men of the United States to an acquaintance with each other. The proposal of such an institution was new, and many with the best wishes doubted its practicability. Some, from motives of prudence, waited to see the completion of its arrangements and the list of its members, *previous to committing themselves*. The number of members who have in form been admitted and given their decided assent is between ninety and one hundred.'

We call this extraordinary, on comparing it with the following version of the same passage in a second edition of the same circular.

'The list of officers and members is furnished, as far as under present circumstances it can be made out: but that of the members is to be considered only as an approximation to one strictly accurate. Our extensive territory, and the imperfect knowledge of the character of our scholars, as such, make it a work of time and much difficulty to obtain correct information, and to introduce the literary men of the United States to an acquaintance with each other. The proposal of such an institution was new, and many with the best wishes doubted its practicability. Some, from motives of prudence, waited to see the completion of its arrangements and the list of its members, *previous to committing themselves*. *To some whose names are used it has not been convenient to communicate the requisite information. A few names are inserted of candidates, who, from what is at present known, will be admitted. It is difficult to draw a perfect separating line under present circumstances.* The number of members who have in form been admitted and given their decided assent, is between ninety and one hundred.'

The doings of the Academy, as far as we are able to judge from the circulars, have been confined to the proposal of a premium of not less than \$400 and a gold medal for the best written history of the United States, to serve as a class-book for academies and schools; of a premium of \$200 and a gold medal for a small volume of original reading lessons for common schools; of a gold medal to be presented on behalf of the society to Mr Charles Botta, of Italy, in acknowledgment of his history of the American Revolution; and of a premium of \$400 and a gold medal for 'a popular treatise on natural philosophy or useful science.' It should be added, that in the last circular, it is stated that 'the more elaborate dissertations are reserved for the first regular volume of transactions, for which a few interesting papers are yet expected in time.' It is also stated in the second circular, that the Rev. J. M. Mason, D. D. late provost of Columbia College, is chairman of a committee to collect throughout the United States a list of alleged Americanisms.

With these premises, an extensive correspondence has been carried on, as it appears, of an *unofficial* kind, between the corresponding secretary and various members, selections from which are given in the third circular. The first remark which occurs to us on the subject of this academy, is, that it is eminently entitled to the name bestowed by Louis XVIII on one of his chambers of deputies, of the *undiscoverable*. We have bestowed some attention on the subject, with the design of rendering the institution whatever aid we could, if in no other way, at least, by making the public acquainted with the Academy's proceedings, through the medium of our pages. We have been unable, however, to obtain any idea of what the Academy is designed to be. By a literary and scientific academy, we understand an association of learned men, in some great city, who at their meetings communicate to each other the fruits of their studies, in the form of memoirs, which are afterwards generally published; and who associate with their body, under the name of corresponding or honorary members, distinguished intellectual characters in other places. This, however, does not appear to describe the new American academy, for, with the exception of a small list of resident members, the very great majority of officers and members are non-residents. This circumstance does not, it is true, create a total obstacle to assembling; a member may travel from

Baltimore, Philadelphia, or Boston to New York ; though not very advantageously from New Orleans, Lexington, and Brunswick, at which several places, high functionaries of the Academy reside. Nor does it appear that any system of deputation is projected, by which nonresident members shall meet at stated periods in some capital. It seems then to us, that the first great requisite to a society, viz. *associating*, fails. The members are not to meet each other : and in consequence can render each other no service, in capacity of being fellow members, or in other words, the academy will do no good. If it be replied to this, that the active portion of the academy is intended to consist of the resident members at New York, and that the nonresident members are merely associated in the usual complimentary way, we rejoin first, that this does not appear to be the fact. The president, two of the three vice presidents, and all the eleven counsellors are nonresidents. If these offices mean any thing, the active portion of the society is not at New York ; if they do not mean any thing, why have them ? But on examining the contents of the circulars, we find a still further proof, that the academy is not intended to be a local academy, with nonresident associates. The subject of offering a premium for a text-book of natural philosophy and useful science having been stated, page 10th of the second circular, it is added, ‘ this preamble and resolution are proposed for consideration, and the opinions of members are requested concerning their modification or adoption.’ Yet we perceive no possible way, in which opinions are to be collected throughout the union, but by a correspondence ; and how any thing like literary *stimulus* and excitement can be expected to grow out of so cumbrous an organization, we cannot imagine. Again, on the same page of the second circular, we read,

‘ At the last meeting of the Society, the following was *proposed* for consideration,

Resolved, That a gold medal be presented, in behalf of this Society, to Signior CHARLES BOTTA, of Italy, author of the History of the American Revolution ; and that the Hon. William Tilghman, Chief Justice of Pennsylvania, Langdon Cheves, Esq. President of the Bank of the United States, and Robert Walsh, jun. Esq. be requested to procure and transmit the same.

‘ The reason offered for this procedure is, that it is just, creditable and politic to take an honorable notice of the man, who in

a foreign country and a foreign language, has, by a work of much merit, contributed to make our character more known and respected.'

Here we have an important procedure *proposed* as just, creditable, and politic, and to be conducted by three most respectable gentlemen. To *whom* is it proposed to be adopted or rejected? We presume to the academy at large, who are to express their opinions, through the medium of correspondence. But we find in another copy of the *same* circular, a sort of second edition, though containing nearly the same matter, that 'the committee above named have approved the resolution and accepted the appointment.' Here we are somewhat embarrassed. In both copies of the circular, it is said the medal for Mr Botta is proposed for consideration, but in one of the copies, it is immediately added, that the committee have approved the resolution and accepted the appointment. The difficulty is a little increased, by the consideration that the committee are all nonresidents. Now we ask merely for information, on the comparison of these premises, who is competent to propose measures for consideration? Who to consider and adopt them? By whom was this medal considered and adopted, between the publication of the first and second editions of the second circular, and what is to be understood by a resolution which was but proposed for the academy's consideration, being approved by the committee only *nominated* in the resolution, and when thus approved, the committee then accepting the appointment to a trust created by the resolution, of which their own previous approbation is the only sanction we can find. We beg not to be understood to express an objection to the measure in question: it is a matter of entire indifference. We wish merely to authorize our remark, that the academy has no organization, or that it is impossible to discover what it is.

To a literary society, on a reasonable and practical plan, we should certainly be very friendly. Did the men of science and letters of New-York see fit to associate themselves into an institution of this kind, (though we think that it would be far better to employ their efforts, under the auspices of the respectable institutions, which already exist in that city,) did they give the world, in the form of published memoirs, or in the proposal of premiums, or any other mode of academical operation, the proof of their earnestness and zeal, we are quite

sure that they would carry with them the good wishes of all friends of American literature, and of none more sincerely than ourselves. How much could be effected would depend altogether on the qualification and zeal of the members, and on what was effected would depend the estimation, in which the compliment of honorary membership would be held in other parts of this country and in Europe. But we feel little doubt that this is all that can reasonably be attempted, and we regard the entire failure of the American academy, after three years' experiment, even to propose an organized *modus operandi*, as satisfactory demonstration of the impossibility of the thing. It will be said, perhaps, that the most respectable gentlemen in the country have given it their sanction, and we shall be pointed to the extracts and selections from their letters in the circular of the corresponding secretary. But to what have they given their sanction? We say there is nothing to sanction. There is no academy; there is no where an organized literary body, with a distinct mode of operation, which body so operating these gentleman have sanctioned. It is a matter of course, that if a gentleman receives a polite letter, telling him that he is chosen a member of the 'American Academy of Language and Belles Lettres, of which the secretary of state is president, and the judges of the supreme court are vice-presidents,' that he will write as polite an answer, saying he accepts the honor. We cannot but observe, however, the discretion with which some of these acceptances are expressed. Mr Mason of Portsmouth judiciously observes, 'that it is obvious that the usefulness of such an association must depend wholly on the talents, literary acquirements, and consequent public influence of the individuals who compose it. Without knowing who the individuals are, that are expected or intended to contribute to the association, I can form no definite opinion of the probability of its final success and usefulness.' We would add, that it is not merely the talents and literary acquirements of the nominal members of the academy, that will determine its respectability, but the degree, to which the organization of the academy will call their talents and acquirements into activity. The printed list of members comprises no small proportion of the respectability of our country. Great value would be attached to the opinion of almost any individual upon it, upon any subject, on which it should be expressed. And yet who knows of any influence of the American

Academy of Language and Belles Lettres over public opinion. We venture to say not half our readers ever heard of it. The letter of Mr Jay is also characterized by a discretion almost of that species, which in lighter matters is called sliness. ‘I perceive that the prudence of proceeding circumspectly has not escaped their attention, *and care will doubtless be taken, that the publications, made by their direction and desire, be such as shall comport with the style and design of the academy.*’ The letters, from which the foregoing extracts are made, and all the others, express abundant good wishes for the success of the institution. In these, however, it is in vain to pretend that their respectable writers bestow any specific sanction on any existing organization; for, as we have repeated, no such organization exists.

It might seem invidious to engage in the criticism of the materials which make up the circulars. The letters of most of the gentlemen, we presume not to have been intended for publication; those of the corresponding secretary, which make up the greater portion of the pamphlets, appear to have been designed for that purpose. They are a series of essays on the community of language with England, on popular education, on national sentiment, and various other topics; and they appear to be written by the *motu proprio* of the secretary, without any specific injunction of the society. Some of them are quite long, and appear to have been composed in an uncommonly zealous construction of the duties of a *corresponding* secretary. They contain many just remarks, but we must confess we do not regard them as very well written, nor calculated to impress the literary public in general, particularly abroad, with a very high idea of the institution. They are by no means free from grammatical errors, and are vague and wordy. When the world, moreover, shall hear this institution ask, ‘If the little territory of *Achaia*, with scarcely any other advantage than merely being free, could so exalt the Athenian name, what ought the world to demand from this wide-spread country, with all its resources?’ it will be apt to conclude, that although an academy of language and belles lettres, it is not one of history or geography.

We hope that no invidious construction will be put on any of our remarks or their general design. To every rational effort to promote the literary improvement of our country, none would contribute more heartily than we. Were the operations

of this society what they are repeatedly stated to be in the circulars, practical, prudent, unostentatious, we should not have a word to say. But a colossal organization of officers is displayed, a fund is collected, and vast ultimate objects of a national and philosophical kind talked of in high terms, without a single practical hint, that we can fix on, or so much as the project of the plan, by which these objects are to be attained. There is in fact nothing wanting to this academical institution, but the single fact of being an academy, and until something is done to make it one, we shall rest in the unpleasant conclusion that Mrs Glass, author of that renowned precept, 'first catch a turbot,' has lived and written in vain. In the circulars hitherto issued, there is no suggestion or hint toward any thing like a meeting of the academy, nothing like a call on the president, vice-presidents and counsellors to assume their function, nothing like an indication to the corresponding members of the nature of the tribunal, which is to receive, act upon, reject or print their communications. In lieu of all this, we are told that the academy wishes to collect opinions, proceed slowly, and modify its progress by experience. But is it to be determined by experience, whether the academy shall meet or not meet; whether its officers shall act or not act; whether its members shall contribute or not contribute to the volumes of its transactions? If all these things are to be ascertained by experience, then there is one other point also to be ascertained by experience, viz. whether the academy exists or does not exist; and we cannot but think the experience of the three years last past strongly in favor of the latter. In fact, the academy thus far resolves itself into a fund raised by contribution, from different parts of the United States, for printing a desultory, complimentary, formal correspondence. It is unnecessary to say, that the names of many of the gentlemen, whose letters are published, secure the public interest for whatever they are subscribed to; but their letters form a small portion only of the pamphlets, and what the American Academy of Language and Belles Lettres has to do with the replies, which the corresponding secretary has been pleased, at great length, to make to some of them, we should be glad to know. Some of these letters are elaborate essays of eight finely printed octavo pages, which it requires much leisure or a strong sense of duty to write or read; and by what warrant they are written, does not appear. Our little experience in learned societies has not

prepared us for this mode of performing the duty of a corresponding secretary. We understand that officer to be charged with writing official letters on behalf and by order of their academy ; and the goodness of an official letter is commonly in inverse ratio to its length. We would not dwell unkindly on this, but that we are threatened with the continuance of the system. The third circular begins thus :—‘ The following pamphlet, *though a very imperfect work*, will be in some degree a guide to the general views of the Academy of Language and Belles Lettres. It is not calculated for publication ; but to serve as a temporary basis, for *farther* expected communications, *preparatory* to a more full and formal production.’ Why a pamphlet, ostensibly consisting of official letters between members of an academy and the secretary, should be *a very imperfect work*, we do not comprehend. We can think of nothing human so easily made perfect, in its kind. But we suppose this qualification was dictated by the corresponding secretary’s modesty, who felt that it was in name only an official correspondence, and in reality a series of essays of his own production. Were it not this, he could have no warrant so far to let diffidence of his own merit prevail over respect for his distinguished correspondents, as to call the pamphlet, consisting of their joint productions, ‘ a very imperfect work.’ It is then a production, and we take upon us to add, an unofficial production of the secretary. How then can it serve as ‘ a guide to the general views of the academy ?’ Does the secretary mean to say, with Louis XIV, *l’academie, c’est moi ?* If so, the corresponding members and the public may wish to see in what terms, and for what imaginable end, the secretary was authorized, by the academy, to run into these weary dissertations. But all this is only ‘ a temporary basis for further expected communications.’ This circular is to be sent round, other letters invited, or selected from those received, more long answers, we presume, to be written, and the pamphlet now terminating at page 40, *in the middle* of the letter of a gentleman, who is doubtless highly gratified with this new method of abridgment, will be continued to page 80. And when these ‘ farther expected communications’ are received, what purpose is the whole to serve ? It is to be ‘ preparatory to a more full and formal production.’ By whom, and for whom, and about what, is this more full and formal production to be written ? Some eighty pages like ours have already been printed. This

is declared to be a temporary basis to farther expected communications, which, according to the usual proportions of a superstructure to its base, must be twice or thrice as bulky, and all is preparatory to a more full and formal production;—on what subject and for what end is not hinted. If (what we have no particular reason to suspect, but as is commonly the case) there is no secret history to these doings, which we, at a distance being uninitiated, cannot get at, we are constrained to pronounce the whole enterprize one of the most signal displays of unprofitable fuss-making, we have ever witnessed. The circular immediately goes on to say,—‘To some it may perhaps appear that a more public and imposing display is unnecessarily delayed (!)—but from every consideration of lasting usefulness, it appeared more important that no wrong step should be taken, than that any specific amount of measureable labor should be performed in a given time. Those, to whom it has fallen to perform the humble task of pioneers, could not be less anxious than others, to witness the favorable result of their exertions; but they would betray a great want of judgment in neglecting substantial objects, and seeking their gratification in a premature and vain parade.’ Now what but parade, we are free to ask, has the society brought forth? It is not a defence to say, that the objects, about which the corresponding secretary has written, are substantial; that a national dictionary, a standard of language, a system of intercourse to transmit books from New-Orleans to Brunswick, London, and St Petersburg, that mental philosophy,* that national instruction, and we know not what else; that these are solid, substantial objects. What will, what can the academy do, what has it begun to do, what has it undertaken to do, for any of them? Nothing. It has only said, they would be fine things, if well done. This we apprehend was known before, and to nominate a vast faculty of officers, and publish an array of correspondence all over the union, for the purpose of asserting the importance of these objects, is empty parade. When the academy shall, by any link of practical operations, bind itself to these substantial objects, its own character will be substantial; till then, the objects will remain substantial, the academy mere talk,

Par levibus ventis volucrique simillima somno.

* ‘The attention of the society will be particularly called to the subject of mental philosophy.’ p. 33. This will constitute in foreign eyes rather a queer item in the pursuits of an Academy of Language and Belles Lettres.